

Empathetic Attitude Reports

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I will argue for a novel syntactic and semantic analysis of what I will call *empathetic attitude reports*, attitude reports with a DP and CP complement of the sort below:

- (1) a. *I believe you that you will come back.*
b. *I trust you that you will keep the secret.*
c. *I hear you that you cannot move.*
d. *I understand you that you are not in the mood.*

Empathetic attitude reports, at first sight, seem on a par semantically with attitude reports with response-stance verbs (Cattell 1978), as in (2), where the clausal complement gives the content of a contextually given claim or suggestion as well as the content of the reported speech act:

- (2) *John confirmed that it will rain.*

However, there are syntactic and semantic arguments against such an assimilation. I will instead argue that attitude verbs as they occur in (1a-d) primarily describe relations (of trust, perception etc) between two agents and only derivatively ascribe a propositional content to the subject referent. One argument for that view is that the attitude verbs that can enter the construction in (1) need not be able to take clausal complements without the object NP. For example German *vertrauen* 'trust' does not take *that*-clauses without the DP object:

- (3) **Ich vertraue, dass du das machst.* 'I trust that you will do that'.

Moreover the verbs that can enter the construction in (1) can all occur without the *that*-clause (*I believe / trust / hear / understand you*).

On my analysis, attitude verbs in the construction in (1) denote two-place relation between an individual *d* and an individual *d'* and the function of the *that*-clauses is, in first approximation, that of specifying the respect in which *d* holds the attitude (of belief, trust, perception, understanding) with respect to *d'*. Such a semantics of (1a-d) is based on a syntactic analysis on which the object DP and the *that*-clause in (1a-d) form a small clause, parallel to (3):

- (3) *I saw John angry.*

Syntactically this is plausible because the sentences in (1) match double-object constructions such as (4), which are generally taken to involve a small clause (Kayne 1984, Harley 2002):

- (4) *I gave [sc John a book].*

In (3), *angry* specifies a respect in which the speaker perceives John, in just the way the *that*-clause in (1a) specifies the content of a speech act that gives the respect in which the speaker believes the addressee. Just as (3) roughly means 'I saw John with respect to being angry', (1a) can be paraphrased as 'I believe you with respect to your promise that you will come back'.

Unlike in standard-double object constructions, but like in small-clause constructions in general, the clausal small-clause predicate in empathetic attitude reports can formally be either a complement or an adjunct. It is a complement in the corresponding German sentence with *glauben* 'believe', where the clause can be replaced by a pronoun/quantifier and the clause permits argument extraction (impossible with adjunct clauses):

- (5) a. *Ich habe dir das / etwas geglaubt.* 'I believed you that / something.'

- b. *Was soll ich dir glauben, hast du e geschafft?* 'What should I believe that you have achieved?'

It is an adjunct with German *hoeren* 'hear', where a replacement of the clause by a DP is impossible (**Ich hoere dich das* 'I hear you that'), as is argument extraction (**Was_i hoere ich dich dass du nicht e_i machen kannst?* 'What do I hear you that you cannot do?')

There are several important observations in support of (1a-d) describing an attitudinal relation between agents, relativized to a respect, and against a semantic assimilation to response-stance verbs.

[1] In (1a), the content involved in the belief need not be the same as that of the addressee's speech act. On the reading of (1a) on which the addressee made a promise, it is not the promise that is the target of the speaker's belief, but rather that the addressee will come back as a fulfillment of her promise, that is, the fulfilment of the promise or its sincerity.

[2] DP₁ *believes that* S may be true without DP₁ *believes* DP₂ *that* S being true: (1a') may be true without (1a) being true, for example, in a situation in which the speaker thinks the addressee intends to lie about returning, but would in the end come back anyway:

(1) a'. *I believe that you will come back.*

The speaker's belief in (1a), but not in (1a'), needs to be strictly based on the speaker's trust in the sincerity of the addressee's speech act.

This also holds for the contrast between (1c) and (1'c):

(1c') *I understand that you are not in the mood.*

(1c) requires empathy with the addressee as the grounds for the speaker's understanding; grasping of a proposition won't be enough, unlike for (1c').

[3] DP₁ *believes* DP₂ *that* S may be true without DP₁ *believes that* S being true. Particularly good examples involve predicates of personal taste and of subjective evaluation. Thus (5a) and (5b) can both be true, as can (6a) and (6b):

(6) a. *I believe you that the coffee is tasteless.* (the addressee having COVID 19)

b. *I do not believe that the coffee is tasteless.*

(7) a. *I believe you that the problem is hard.*

b. *I do not believe that the problem is hard.*

The truth of (6a) and (7a) may be based on the speaker putting herself in the addressee's shoes (empathy or simulation, cf. Moltmann 20016), without actually sharing the addressee's experience or evaluation.

Empathetic attitude reports thus are directly only about the speaker's attitude (of trust, understanding, ...) toward the addressee, with respect to what the addressee is saying in the relevant situation, and only derivatively about the sharing of a propositional content. The *that*-clause then has the function of giving the content of a speech act that specifies the respect in which an agent enters an attitudinal relation towards another agent: belief or trust in the addressee with respect to her speech act with content S; understanding or hearing the addressee with respect to her saying that S.

To complete the syntactic and semantic proposal, I will assume that small clauses of the sort [DP₁ DP₂/CP] involve a light verb, as has been argued for small clauses in double-object constructions (Harley 2002; Harley/Jung 2015). In Hayley/Jung's (2015) analysis, this is the light verb *have* (John gave [_{Phave}Mary[_{Psay}[_{Psay}have] [the book]]) for *John gave Mary a book*). In (1a-d) the small clause will contain the light verb *say*, drawing on recent arguments to the effect that *say* is a light verb (Grimshaw 2015). *Say* as a light verb describes a locutionary act that may be part of the illocutionary act (claim, promise) relevant in the context (Austin 1962). Thus, we have for (1a):

(8) I believe [_{PsayP}[DP you] [_{Psay}[_{Psay} say] that you will come]]].

This analysis applies both to *that*-clauses having argument-like and having adjunct-like status, just as small-clause analyses for adjectives are meant to (*I saw John angry, John ate the meat raw*).

As for the semantics of small clauses, I take non-resultative small clauses to be interpreted as situated objects or qua-objects in roughly the sense of Fine (1982). That is, the small clause in (3) is interpreted as John qua being angry (i.e. John as someone being angry, John in a situation in which only his anger matters), where s_c is the speaker in the context c

(3') see(s_c , John qua λx [angry])

Similarly, the small clause in (1a) will be interpreted as the addressee qua promising that she will return. It is the qua-object or situated individual that the empathetic attitudinal object takes as an argument. Thus, (1a) will be interpreted as below, where a_c is the addressee in context c and $f_{a,c}$ the illocutionary force with a_c as agent relevant I context c :

(9) (believe(s_c , a_c qua [λx [($f_{a,c}$ (say(x , [*that he will return*)]))]))))

The truthconditions of empathetic attitude reports hinge on the lexical meaning of two-place attitudinal relations between two agents and general conditions on qua objects, from which conditions of the sort below are to be derived:

(10) If believe(d , d' qua λx [($f_{a,c}$ (say(x , [*that S*])))), then d believes that S qua empathizing with d' , and d believes the sincerity condition of the illocutionary act defined by $f_{a,c}$ (say(x , [*that S*])) is fulfilled.

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